

MANAGER'S GUIDE TO THE NASA HIRING PROCESS

Introduction

This guide is intended to help NASA managers understand the NASA hiring process and the important role hiring managers have in every phase.

Hiring Has Been Automated - What is Different?

In the last three years we have implemented NASA STARS, a Resumix-based automated hiring system, so there have been some changes in the way we do business. However, the essential steps, and your involvement in the process, are the same. You will still send a request to fill a vacant position to your Center human resources (HR) staff, and then work with the HR staff to analyze the job to identify the major requirements of the position, and the important competencies that meet those requirements. You will still be a major player in the recruitment process. Once you receive the electronic referral list, you will interview and make a selection just as you did in the old manual process.

Your Role in Job Analysis and Skill Selection

The rating criteria used to determine which applicants will be referred to you for selection will be based on an in-depth analysis of the job. The HR Specialist will work closely with you or a subject matter expert (SME) to determine the major job duties, and to identify those duties that are most important. Analysis of the job will entail a review of the position description, classification standard, resume of the last incumbent, etc., to ensure that the duties are fully understood.

Once the major duties have been identified through job analysis, the HR Specialist will work with you or the SME to identify the competencies or skills needed to successfully perform those major duties. Normally, between 10 and 15 skills in NASA STARS will be identified. Candidates who do not have these skills are not qualified for the position. Then you will be asked to identify which of these skills are most important (primary). (At least four of the skills should be identified as primary.) These decisions will be used later in the NASA STARS Weighting and Referral Tool. Identification of competencies replaces development of crediting plans with multiple level descriptions.

Failure to do a complete job analysis can result in a less than satisfactory referral list. For example, in an action to fill a Public Information Specialist position, an outdated position description was used that did not include the critical duty of managing a "converged" newsroom. Because the duty was not identified in the job analysis, the skills list that was developed did not include any skills related to this critical duty and applicants on the referral list did not have all of the skills necessary to perform the job.

Your participation in job analysis is critical to the accurate identification of competencies that will produce a list of highly qualified candidates for your vacancy

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What are Resumix skills?

Resumix uses artificial intelligence to “read” resumes. It automatically matches words in context to the rules Resumix has built under each skill. (You will also hear skills referred to as “grammar” or “the knowledge base”.) It is important to note that Resumix is not a “word match” system. Each skill will have rules (alternatives) behind it that capture all the different ways a skill could be expressed in a resume. For example, the alternatives within the skill “Thermal Protection” are:

- thermal protection
- thermal insulation
- thermal material properties
- reusable surface insulation
- reusable thermal system
- thermal resistance
- thermal analysis
- thermal design
- aerothermal heating
- ablator system
- repair thermal
- thermal repair

Applicants with any one of these phrases in their resume will be credited with the skill. Some skills have only a few rules behind them; others have hundreds. Depending on the skill, rules may be simple phrases, or more complex phrases with action words such as “manage” or “analyze.” The point is that applicants do not have to use the exact skill name to get credit for the skill.

Some of the skill rules are part of the “core grammar” and were created by Resumix knowledge engineers. Other skills are locally created by NASA specialists to supplement what is in the core grammar. Development of local grammar is done on an “as needed” basis. You should not hesitate to ask your HR specialist about the possibility of developing local grammar if you feel that what is in the system does not accurately reflect the skills you need.

Resumix is not a “word match” system

What is the Weighting and Referral Tool?

The NASA STARS Weighting and Referral Tool is used by the HR specialist to assign a weight to the most important skills (primary), so that applicants who have the most relevant experience receive appropriate credit. The HR specialist also uses this tool to create and send referral lists to managers.

Your Role in Recruiting

You may be involved in recruiting at several points in the hiring process. As part of NASA’s effort to attract top talent in a competitive job market, you may be asked to

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participate in job fairs and college recruitment efforts. For your own vacancies, you should certainly use your professional and academic contacts to locate qualified candidates and encourage them to apply when positions are announced. You should also let the HR specialist know when you have a leading candidate.

**You have a role in finding the best qualified applicants
for your job**

Your Role in the Application Process

Since you may be the first point of contact for applicants and your own employees who are interested in applying, you should understand what is required to ensure that applications are properly prepared and submitted.

Under the NASA STARS process, application forms such as the SF-171 or OF-612 are no longer accepted. Applicants are required to create and submit electronic resumes through OPM's USAJOBS resume builder. Applicants are allowed to have up to 5 resumes in their USAJOBS account. Most resumes are received through USAJOBS; a small number of resumes are received in paper form and are electronically scanned into NASA STARS.

You should encourage applicants and employees to use OPM's resume builder. Because resumes submitted this way are received as text files, they are not subject to the occasional errors introduced by the scanning process.

You should also encourage applicants to submit resumes that completely represent their skills and competencies applicable to the position for which they are applying. Some centers have received resumes with one or two sentence descriptions of highly technical positions that do not truly reflect what applicants are actually doing. If skills and competencies are not completely and adequately described in the resume, the applicant may lose consideration for the position.

Other points to emphasize with applicants:

- Be specific
- Use action words
- Use technical terms
- Spell out an acronym the first time

**You should be knowledgeable about how to write a
resume**

The Referral List

Accessing the List

When the HR office is ready to issue a referral list, they will generate an e-mail to you from the Weighting and Referral tool. The e-mail will notify you that a referral list has

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been issued, and will include a link (URL) to the Web. The referral list and list of resumes will appear in your Web browser as an Adobe PDF file. The referral list will be on the right hand window. On the left you will see a list of resumes attached to that referral list. When you click on each candidate name, the candidate's resume will appear.

Referral List Types

There are three types of NASA referral lists:

- **Noncompetitive.** This list is used for candidates who do not have to compete for placement in the vacancy. Candidates on these lists are normally in alphabetical order.
- **Competitive Placement Plan (CPP).** This list is used for consideration of current and former government employees. Candidates on these lists are normally in alphabetical order.
- **Delegated Examining (DE).** The DE list is used when jobs are announced to the public at large. Candidates are placed on these lists by either:
 - quality grouping: veteran's preference and score, or
 - category rating: veterans' preference and category.

The choice of the rating method to be used must have been specified in the vacancy announcement. In both cases, veteran preference candidates must be selected before non-veterans below them on the list. The referral list instructions will address specific selection limitations.

What is Category Rating?

Category rating is an alternative ranking and selection procedure authorized in the Homeland Security Act of 2002. It can be used to rank qualified applicants for delegated examining against minimum qualification requirements by placing them into one of two or more predefined quality categories instead of ranking them using the traditional numerical score. The purpose of category rating is to increase the number of qualified applicants a manager has to choose from while preserving veterans' preference rights. The advantage to this method over the traditional method of quality grouping is that the number of qualified applicants on your referral list is not limited to three. However, if there are veterans in the top group, they still must be selected before any non-veterans.

Why Do I Have Only One or Two Applicants on My List?

Merit selection rules specify that only the best qualified applicants are to be referred for selection consideration. It is possible that for some hard to fill jobs, there are only a few candidates who meet the best qualified criteria. In these cases you may want to discuss additional recruiting efforts with your HR specialist.

If you have a delegated examining list prepared using the quality grouping method, and there are veterans on it, only the top three applicants can be referred. Some centers refer only the veterans on delegated examining lists since the hiring manager may not select a non-veteran if veterans are available. In addition, compensable disability veterans must be placed at the top of lists for non-professional and non-scientific positions below the GS-9, regardless of their scores.

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An applicant's veteran preference may affect who you can select from a referral list

The Selection Process

If you are a manager with a great deal of recent experience in reviewing resumes, interviewing and making selection decisions, this information may seem rather obvious to you. But it is important to emphasize some of the key factors in this process, particularly for new supervisors, or those who have not had an opportunity to fill positions in a long time.

Reviewing Resumes

Earlier in the process you worked with the HR staff to develop a list of skills to be used in the rating and ranking process, and indicated which of the skills were most important or "primary". The system used those skills to determine which applicants were potentially in the best-qualified group for referral, and the HR specialist verified that the candidates met all requirements for referral.

Before you begin your review, you may want to prepare a worksheet to record the extent to which the applicants possess the skills used to determine the best qualified group. It is important to understand that the degree or depth of experience the applicant possesses for each skill is not evident at this point. As you list the skills, it may be beneficial to record them in priority order so you can quickly assess who has the most experience in the critical skills you need for this position.

It may also be prudent to record other impressions on your worksheet by adding new categories after the skills listing. Depending on the grade level involved, the quality of the resume tells you many things. The basic flow and readability of the resume represents the applicant's ability to communicate through writing skills. It is a fair, and in many cases a necessary step, to evaluate the writing ability of applicants. Another insight that can be derived is how the person organizes their thoughts. How the applicants organized and described their duties and experience may give some indication of their reasoning processes. It is worth recording your assessment for both of these criteria as you read the resume.

The first and most important factor for the selecting official is that the applicant possesses the competencies and experience required by the position. The first review should be a determination of competencies. Do not look for exact word matches but make a qualitative assessment of what skills in the applicant's resume match your needs. Also, look for and record other unique skills that may enhance job performance and set the applicant apart from the others.

Next, review the resumes for incentive awards and current performance ratings. As a selecting official, you must fully consider these factors when assessing the candidates.

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Finally, review the education, training, professional licenses and certificate information. If there is an education requirement, treat it as a skill and note it. If not, review the information and determine if the applicant's educational background further supports or enhances the position requirements.

<p>Review resumes in a systematic way against your job requirements</p>

Interviewing Applicants

Importance of the Interview

Now you are ready to interview. Interviewing is strongly encouraged since this will be your opportunity to gather additional information from the applicants. Since the resume is only a brief description of the individual's background, an interview should provide more information for you to use in making your selection. It can be especially useful in evaluating such skills as oral communication and interpersonal skills that are not otherwise easily measured. The interview also provides an opportunity for face-to-face information exchange, affording the applicant an opportunity to learn about your organization. The Competitive Placement Plan for your Center covers whether an interview is required, and if so, at what grade levels. Please consult with your HR representative.

Techniques for Interviewing

If you do interview, the questions you ask should elicit job-related information relative to an applicant's knowledge, skills, and ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position. You should prepare the questions ahead of time. All candidates should be treated in the same manner. Generally, you should ask the same questions of each candidate. However, you may need to ask some other questions to obtain additional or clarifying information in order to assess an individual's specific qualifications for the position.

Questions that could lead to consideration of non-job related information should be avoided. Of particular concern are questions related to an applicant's personal life. Employment laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace apply to interviews as well. As a result, questions that probe race, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, age, marital status, family situation, or disabilities are unlawful in an interview.

All applicants should be allotted the same amount of time with time allowed for the applicant to ask questions of the interviewer(s).

In all cases, it is a good idea to add notes to your worksheet so you do not have to recall from memory key points. You should also note the date, time, place and length of the interview and keep a copy of your interview questions.

Some dos and don'ts:

DO explain the key areas to be covered.

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DO use open-ended questions that require some thought on the candidate's part before responding.

DO ask follow up questions based on what the candidate has said.

DO ascertain the candidate's ability to meet any specific requirements (regular overtime, travel, if required, etc.).

DO NOT jump to conclusions.

DO NOT ask questions with no measurable answers.

DO NOT administer any type of test or formally score interview questions.

DO NOT ask questions that could lead to consideration of non job-related information, such as:

- Are you married, pregnant, etc.?
- Do you have children and is adequate childcare available?
- What nationality or race are you?
- What religious holidays do you observe?

<p>Be sure your interview questions are job related and that you treat applicants equally</p>

Who Conducts the Interview?

Usually, the selecting official conducts the interview. However, the selecting official may designate another person or a panel having knowledge of the position to be filled to conduct the interview. When panels are used, be sure to consider diversity when designating panel members. With panels, it is advisable to designate a member to record the candidate responses, and to decide which members will ask which questions.

Checking References

If you chose not to interview, you should have an indication of the top applicants that you need to scrutinize further to determine who is the best qualified for your vacant position. In either case, now is the time to check references, if available, on the top applicants and begin to narrow your focus. You should check work references, preferably using prior supervisors over personal references since they have knowledge of the candidate's work performance. However, contact the current supervisor only if the candidate has given permission. The candidate's permission is indicated at the bottom of the resume under Supplemental Information. It is also advisable to obtain more than one reference for each candidate.

You should ask about performance and other pertinent aspects of the candidate's employment. The questions should focus on the candidate's overall qualifications for the position and how the reference assesses the candidate's fitness for the job. Be sure to ask follow-on questions or ask for additional information about something that is not clear.

It is advisable to verify the candidate's current employment including position(s) held, dates and reason for leaving. You may want to ask the reference to describe the

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applicant's work relationships, work attitude, quality of work product and, his/her strengths and weaknesses on the job. Additionally, you may want to obtain the reference's overall assessment of the candidate's work performance, if they would recommend him/her for your position, and if they would rehire the candidate. It is also a good idea to add notes to your worksheet on responses, as well as the name, relationship to the candidate, and the date. It is a good idea to keep a copy of your questions.

Making Your Selection

There can be two approaches to a selection. All selectees must be best qualified, but a key question is the need for further training. Some positions require that the selectee be fully qualified in all functional skills and take over a function with little assistance or training. Some positions may require experience in problem solving, management or other less functional skills, with follow-on training in functional skills once on board. It is a good idea to think this concept over and determine your direction before screening the resumes.

When you have made your selection, e-mail the HR office with your decision. Print a copy of the referral list and annotate which candidate(s) you interviewed and the codes indicated on the DE list for any declinations. Sign and return it to your HR office.